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NEWS RELEASE

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VIEW NOTABLE BRITISH MODERNIST PAINTINGS AT UM

MISSOULA—

Two paintings by influential modernist British artists are now available for public viewing at The University of Montana.

“E.O.W. on her Blue Eiderdown” by Frank Auerbach and “White Relief” by Ben Nicholson are on view in UM’s Main Hall President’s Office lobby, open to the public from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The paintings are on loan to the Montana Museum of Art & Culture from a private collection.

Auerbach, with colleagues Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff, R.B. Kitaj and Francis Bacon - collectively referred to as the School of London -- helped spearhead a renaissance in British figurative art.

Of Jewish descent, Auerbach was born in Germany in 1931, just as Adolph Hitler came to power. His parents, fearful of the Nazi regime, sent him to a boarding school for refugees in Kent, England, in 1939. Tragically, his parents died in a concentration camp in 1942. Five years later, the orphaned Auerbach moved to London, where he studied art at Borough Polytechnic under the influential teacher David Bomberg.

Auerbach settled at a studio in London’s Camden neighborhood and focused on subject

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matter that consisted of a few local landmarks and a handful of favorite models. Within the constraints of this limited imagery, he created heavily layered and tactile surfaces with thick impasto paint suggestive of corporeality.

Some early critics of his work found the thick paint grotesque, obtrusive and brutal. Others, such as David Sylvester, saw in him "the qualities that make for greatness in a painter -- fearlessness, a profound originality, a total absorption in what obsesses him and, above all, a certain gravity and authority in his forms and colors."

"E.O.W. on her Blue Eiderdown," painted in 1965 and one of Auerbach's thickest works, displays chilly colors -- the spectral white of his model, Estrella Olive West, against the icy blue blanket, balanced by pink, dark red and a cascade of lime green below the quilt.

The viewer senses the physicality of the model in Auerbach's works, an immediacy of experience provided by his arduous observation, deeply personal meditation on form and dense, sensual application of paint.

The deliberately restrained and austere formalism of Nicholson's "White Relief" is in sharp contrast to the intense expression of Auerbach's "E.O.W. on her Blue Eiderdown."

Nicholson (1894-1982) was one of the most important and controversial British modern artists. The son of a famous 19th century painter and printmaker, he left traditional academic painting behind for the freedom and idealism of the growing modernist movement.

Through travel, especially to Paris, Nicholson studied the typical subjects of modernist interest: The Italian Primitives, African art, the paintings of Cézanne, Mondrian and Picasso. Inspired, he realized that art could be abstract and significant, while employing a deliberately

limited vocabulary of forms and colors.

In 1934 Nicholson made the first of his carved and white-painted reliefs that quickly identified him at home and abroad as England's most dedicated modernist.

The reliefs, consisting of carved rectangular and circular forms covered in austere white paint and eloquent in their simplicity and restraint, were met with controversy. His detractors labeled them devoid of feeling and painterly skills, while his supporters praised the Platonic absolute beauty of the straight lines and curves.

In "White Relief" Nicholson explores the potentialities of light on differentiated surfaces and limits the visual vocabulary to achieve freedom from organic associations. The small scale is intimate, while the vertical orientation lends it monumentality reminiscent of the standing stones found throughout Britain.

The intuitive rather than mathematical arrangement of the forms strips "White Relief" of traditional conventions of pictorial space established during the Renaissance.

For more information, call MMAC at 406-243-2019 or go online to <http://www.umt.edu/montanamuseum>.

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NOTE TO MEDIA: Digital images of these artworks are available on request. Call Karen Rice, MMAC coordinator of programs and publications, at 406-243-2019.

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